

New York City Atheists Inc.

JANUARY 2007

Serving the Tri-State area • An affiliate of American Atheists & Center For Atheism

Vol. IV Issue No. 1

WEB: NYC-ATHEISTS.ORG COOPER STATION - Box 93, NY, NY 10276-0093 212-330-6794

ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION NOT A BELIEF

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

JANUARY

Jan. 4*****	Thursday	6:00/7:45 P.M.	NYCA Movie Nite - First Thursday of Month
Jan. 14*	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
Jan. 16**	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up
Jan. 25***	Thursday	6:30 P.M.	NYCA Annual Meeting
Jan. 29****	Saturday	12:15 P.M.	NYCA Thomas Paine Museum Field Trip

FEBUARY

Feb. 1	Thursday	TBA	NYCA Movie Nite - First Thursday of Month
Feb. 11*	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
Feb. 20**	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up
Feb. 22***	Thursday	6:30 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting

- =====
* Garden Restaurant – 145 East 60th St. (Lexington / Third)
Cost: Individual checks plus \$5 suggested donation — Reservations not required
- ** Village Pourhouse (Vegas room) – 64 Third Av. – Entrance on 11th St.
- *** Editorial Freelancers Association – Room 1910 - 71 West 23rd Street - (6th Ave.)
- **** NYC Grand Central Station – Grand Hall – Round Info Booth
- ***** Film Forum – 209 W. Houston St. (6th and Varick)

WEDNESDAY

THIS WEEK IN ATHEISM CABLE SHOW
6:30 PM-CH 57 (MANHATTAN CABLE)
LIVE STREAMING: WWW.MNN.ORG

THURSDAYS

NYC ATHEISTS CABLE SHOW
7:00 PM-CH 67 (MANHATTAN CABLE)
LIVE STREAMING: WWW.MNN.ORG

ATHEIST BOOK CLUB CABLE SHOW
7:30 PM – CH 67 (MANHATTAN CABLE)
LIVE STREAMING: WWW.MNN.ORG

2007

NYC ATHEISTS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION
SEE PAGE 8

NYC Atheists Inc. is a 501-C3 non-profit, non-partisan educational association.

Our meetings and membership are open and all are welcome (both non-believers and believers) atheists, agnostics, humanists, freethinkers, skeptics, secularists, separation-of-church/state advocates and individuals who are questioning and searching beliefs.



KENNETH BRONSTEIN

When, as a teenager, I became an atheist, I decided that I would own my own life. What I meant by that is: I would be my own master, not controlled by any mystical or supernatural force. I would use reason instead of faith to guide my life. Even at that age I knew: life is precious; we only get one chance at it. So I decided that I would go on a continuous *journey of curiosity*. I would have a cultured, energized, experienced, inspired, invigorated, motivated, refreshing and stimulated life.

I have lived that life and am still living it. I have traveled the world from the North Pole to Antarctica, from South American rain forests to African deserts. I have studied under scholars and pragmatists in places of knowledge as diverse as an engineering school and the ivy covered halls of Columbia University. I have observed cultures as diverse as the Mayans of Central America and the Intuits of Siberia. I have experienced, and been invigorated by, the Maasai warriors of Kenyan and the Aborigines of Australia. I have been inspired by the wisdom of Tibetan monks, Chinese Buddhists and African Zulu shamans. I have taught at an African-American college in Tennessee and at UCLA, where the ghetto youths of East Los Angeles filled my classroom. Would I have experienced all this if I weren't an atheist? Perhaps. But I believe it was my decision to satisfy my atheist curiosity that led me to the most interesting, most productive life I could imagine for myself.

Atheism led me to an interesting life because it let me use my full brain potential without getting bogged down in "can'ts" and "shouldn'ts." Atheism allowed me to clear my mental decks so I could *Learn*, *Adapt*, and *Change* without being restricted by Bronze Age mythology. I do not know of any atheist who would not change his views on any subject when new scientific evidence came in; unfortunately, believers do not have this flexibility.

Atheism has allowed me to pursue the 21st Century world scientific view. What interests me in my continued search to whet my curiosity is to not simply look at the world and nature with awe—which is a one-dimensional pursuit—but to understand how it evolved and its relationships to the cosmos. Atheists, as free thinkers, are on a continuous search of understanding and knowledge through studying, questioning, observing, dissecting, comparing and discovering. We are not afraid to go where no person has gone before. We are not afraid to try new methods of discovery, conjecture or analysis. We are the ones who dared to suggest that the earth goes around the sun, that microbes can be seen under a microscope and that a heart can be transplanted from one human to another.

Atheists became Atheists because we are curious individuals. Atheism is a life-long search for understanding with the objective of intellectual and emotional clarity. As an Atheist who uses reason and rationality instead of faith, I feel I have gained a depth and breadth of life that I could hardly have foreseen when I made that significant decision as a boy of 13.

I would appreciate your comments. Ken Bronstein at NYCATHEISTS@aol.com or 212-535-7425

MAKE IT HAPPEN
WE CAN ONLY DO IT WITH YOUR PERSONAL AND FINANCIAL INVOLVEMENT

UPCOMING JANUARY EVENTS

Page 3

Jan. 4, 2007 Thursday
NYCA First Thursday of Month Movie Nite

Movie: *Sacrifice / Leper / Sky Burial*
Location: Film Forum - 209 W Houston Street,
(between 6th Avenue & Varick)

Time: 6:00 PM (Meet in front of theatre
for pre-movie dinner at local restaurant)
Time: 7:45 PM (Meet in front of theatre
for movie)

Movie: (three segments) *SACRIFICE* examines the selling of Burmese girls (some as young as 12) into prostitution in Thailand; *LEPER* travels to Nepal to meet a society of lepers in a remote village, victims of a disease that has ravaged people's lives since ancient times; *SKY BURIAL* records a Tibetan monastery ritual in which corpses are consumed by huge vultures, allowing the cycle of life to continue as the spirits of the deceased merge with the sky.

Jan. 14 Sunday 12:00 P.M.

NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
Location: Garden Restaurant
145 East 60th St. (Lexington and Third)
Reservations: Not required
Cost: Individual checks plus \$5 donation

After brunch, we go to the NYC Atheists Library on West 48th Street for our book club meeting.

The NYCA library includes approximately 700 books as well as numerous CDs, DVDs, cassettes, videotapes, newsletters and magazines.

Jan. 16 Tuesday 7:00 P.M.
NYCA Meet-Up

Location: Village Pourhouse (Vegas room)
64 Third Av. – Entrance on 11th Street

Casual conversation and drinks with your fellow freethinkers.
Cost: Free (cash food and bar)
Register at <http://atheists.meetup.com>

Jan. 25 Thursday 6:30 P.M.
NYCA Annual Meeting

Location: Editorial Freelancers Association –
Room 1910 - 71 West 23rd Street - (6th Ave.)

Program: Review of 2006 Activities, 2007 Plans, Election of Board of Directors, NYCA Cable show videos, general discussion.

Jan. 27, 2007 Saturday
NYCA Thomas Paine Museum Field Trip

Thomas Paine Museum
983 North Avenue
New Rochelle, NY

Time: 12:15 P.M.
Location: NYC Grand Central Station
Grand Hall – Info Booth
Purchase Round trip ticket: \$11.50 (\$7.50 senior)
At the New Rochelle train station take taxi (share about \$8 – each way) to museum.
Will return to city before 5:30 P.M.
Museum / tour: \$10.



Thomas Paine

January 29, 1737– June 8, 1809

From *Wikipedia*, the free web encyclopedia

Thomas Paine was an English-American intellectual, scholar, revolutionary, deist and political and religious thinker, who spent much of his time in America and France. A radical pamphleteer, Paine anticipated and helped foment the American Revolution through his powerful writings, most notably *Common Sense*, an incendiary pamphlet advocating independence from Great Britain. An advocate of liberalism, he outlined his political philosophy in *Rights of Man*, written both as a reply to Edmund Burke's view of the French Revolution and as a general political philosophy treatise

on the benefits of personal liberty and limited government, in which he considers society a representation of human ideals, and government a necessary evil. In *Agrarian Justice*, he argued for a form of welfare state and social security provisions for the old and a capital sum for the young to set them up in their adult career. Paine was also noteworthy for his support of deism, taking its form in his treatise on religion, *The Age of Reason*, as well as for his eye-witness accounts of both the French and American Revolutions.

In September 1774, Paine met Benjamin Franklin in London. Franklin advised Paine to emigrate to the British colonies in America, and wrote him letters of recommendation. Paine left England in October, arriving in Philadelphia on November 30, 1774.

Paine was also an inventor, receiving a patent in Europe for the single-span iron bridge. He developed a smokeless candle, and worked with John Fitch on the early development of steam engines.

Views

Paine was a leader in promoting republicanism and liberalism. He dismissed monarchy and viewed all government as, at best, a necessary evil. He opposed slavery and was among the earliest proponents of universal free public education, a guaranteed minimum income and many other ideas considered radical at the time. Paine published an early anti-slavery tract and was co-editor of the *Pennsylvania Magazine*.

American Revolution

Common Sense, Paine's pro-independence monograph published anonymously on January 10, 1776 spread quickly among literate colonists. About 120,000 copies are alleged to have been distributed throughout the colonies, which themselves totaled only four million free inhabitants, making it the best-selling work in 18th-century America. It convinced many colonists, including George Washington, to seek redress in political independence from Great Britain and argued strongly against any compromise short of independence, greatly influencing the Declaration of Independence. Paine's strength lay in his ability to present complex ideas in clear and concise form, as

opposed to the more philosophical approaches of his Enlightenment contemporaries in Europe. It was Paine who proposed the name United States of America for the new nation. When the war arrived, Paine published a series of important pamphlets, *The Crisis*, credited with inspiring the early colonists during the ordeals faced in their long struggle with the British. The first *Crisis* paper, published on 23 December 1776, began with the famous words:

“These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.”

Washington himself found it so uplifting that he ordered it to be read to all his troops on 25 December 1776, prior to commencing his crossing of the Delaware.



Paine wrote the first part of *The Age of Reason*, an assault on organized "revealed" religion combining a compilation of inconsistencies he found in the Bible with his own advocacy of Deism. In his "Autobiographical Interlude" which is found in *The Age of Reason* between the first and second parts, Paine writes, "Thus far I had written on the 28th of December, 1793. In the evening I went to the Hotel Philadelphia . . . About four in the morning I was awakened by a rapping at my chamber door; when I opened it, I saw a guard and the master of the hotel with them. The guard told me they came to put me under arrestation and to demand the key of my papers. I desired them to walk in, and I would dress myself and go with them immediately."

In the second part of *The Age of Reason*, Paine writes about his illness and the fever he suffered while in prison: "I was seized with a fever that in its progress had every symptom of becoming mortal, and from the effects of which I am not recovered. It was then that I remembered with renewed satisfaction, and congratulated myself most sincerely, on having written the former part of *The Age of Reason*." The content of the work can be briefly summarized in this quotation:

The opinions I have advanced... are the effect of the most clear and long-established conviction that the Bible and the Testament are impositions upon the world, that the fall of man, the account of Jesus Christ being the Son of god, and of his dying to appease the wrath of god, and of salvation by that strange means, are all fabulous inventions, dishonorable to the wisdom and power of the Almighty; that the only true religion is Deism, by which I then meant, and mean now, the belief of one god, and an imitation of his moral character, or the practice of what are called moral virtues—and that it was upon this only (so far as religion is concerned) that I rested all my hopes of happiness hereafter. So say I now—and so help me god.

Paine published his last great pamphlet, *Agrarian Justice*, in the winter of 1795-1796. In this pamphlet, he further developed ideas proposed in the *Rights of Man* concerning the way in which the institution of land ownership separated the great majority of persons from their rightful natural inheritance and means of independent survival. Paine's proposal is considered to be a form of Basic Income Guarantee. The Social Security Administration of the United States recognizes *Agrarian Justice* as the first American proposal for an old-age pension. In *Agrarian Justice* Paine writes:

In advocating the case of the persons thus dispossessed, it is a right, and not a charity... [Government must] create a national fund, out of which there shall be paid to every person, when arrived at the age of twenty-one years, the sum of fifteen pounds sterling, as a compensation in part, for the loss of his or her natural inheritance, by the introduction of the system of landed property; And also, the sum of ten pounds per annum, during life, to every person now living, of the age of fifty years, and to all others as they shall arrive at that age.

In 1800, Paine purportedly had a meeting with Napoleon. Napoleon claimed he slept with a copy of *Rights of Man* under his pillow and went so far as to say to Paine that "a statue of gold should be erected to you in every city in the universe." However, Paine quickly moved from admiration to condemnation as he saw Napoleon's moves towards dictatorship, calling him "the completest charlatan that ever existed." Paine remained in France until 1802 when he returned to America on an invitation from Thomas Jefferson.

Last years

Derided by the public and abandoned by his friends due to his religious views, Paine died at 59 Grove Street in Greenwich Village, New York City, on June 8, 1809. Although the original building is no longer there, the present building has a plaque noting that Paine died at this location. At the time of his death, most US newspapers reprinted the obituary notice from the *New York Citizen*, which read in part: "He had lived long, did some good and much harm." Only six mourners came to his funeral, two of which were black, most likely freedmen.

Legacy

Thomas Paine's writings had great influence on his contemporaries, especially the American revolutionaries. His books inspired both philosophical and working-class Radicals in the United Kingdom; and he is often claimed as an intellectual ancestor by United States liberals, libertarians, progressives and radicals. Both Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Alva Edison read his works with respect.

Additional Quotes

A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong gives it a superficial appearance of being right.

* * *

Belief in a cruel god makes a cruel man.

* * *

My country is the world, and my religion is to do good.

* * *

My mind is my own church.

Reason obeys itself; and ignorance submits to whatever is dictated to it.

The whole religious complexion of the modern world is due to the absence from Jerusalem of a lunatic asylum.

* * *

The World is my country, all mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion.

**AN ATHEIST'S NEW YEARS RESOLUTION:
BE NICE TO BELIEVERS
EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE WRONG**

**STOP
FAITH-BASED SUBSIDIES
THAT WILL BECOME
FAITH-BASED
ENTITLEMENTS!**

**Man invented god;
god did not invent man**

**POVERTY,
HEALTH CARE
HOMELESSNESS**

ARE MORAL ISSUES

STEM CELL RESEARCH IS PRO-LIFE

January Birthdays: Atheists



ISAAC ASIMOV – JANUARY 2, 1920

“I believe in the scientific method and the rule of reason as a way of understanding the natural universe. I don’t believe in the existence of entities that can not be reached by such a method and that are therefore “supernatural.” I certainly don’t believe in the mythologies, in

heaven and hell, in god and angels, in Satan and demons. I’ve thought of myself as an atheist, but that simply described what I didn’t believe, not in what I did. Gradually, though, I became aware that there was a movement called “humanism,” which used that name because, to put it most simply, humanists believe that human beings produced the progressive advance of human society and also the ills that plague it. They believe that if the ills are to be alleviated, it is humanity that will have to do the job.”



STEPHEN HAWKING – JANUARY 8, 1942

“All that my work has shown is, you don’t have to say that the way the universe began was the personal whim of god.”



JACK LONDON – JANUARY 12, 1876

“I see the soul as nothing else than the sum of activities of the organism plus personal habits - plus inherited habits, memories, experiences, of the organism. I believe that when I am dead, I am dead. I believe that with my death I am just as much obliterated as the last mosquito you and I squashed.”



ANDY ROONEY – JANUARY 14, 1919

“No, of course I don’t [believe in god] and anyone who tells you that there is a god who makes his or her presence known to him or her is hallucinating or not telling the truth.”

NYC Atheists Member, Pat Berger, wrote a Letter to Editor to New York Times – November 30, 2006.

Richard A. Shweder, University of Chicago professor, New York Times Op-Ed Contributor of *Atheists Agonistes*. (November 27, 2006) had asked “What explains the current interest among secularists in absolutely positively establishing that the author (god) is a fraud?”

To the Editor:

Atheists can prove that Daniel C. Dennett, Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins wrote their books.

Who can prove that there are books “dictated or co-written by god?” That’s what it’s all about.

Patricia Berger

New York, Nov. 27, 2006

Dear Isabelle:

This is an example of how people use religion as an excuse for a nonreligious purpose. Your plumber evidently needed Sunday as a day of rest, so he invoked the name of a deity as the reason. If there were indeed a viable deity, I can't imagine Him being very impressed by someone who caused you to be inconvenienced on "his" day. It seems like an insignificant and mean-spirited way to honor a deity. On the other hand, it's certainly more benign than sacrificing a virgin to honor a deity, as the Aztecs did. I suspect your plumber is using "the lord's day" as an excuse to watch the football game and drink beer. Call an atheist plumber.

Dear Cassandra:

Though I am an Atheist, I like to visit a Catholic church now and then to smell the incense and watch light rays filter through the stained glass windows that depict bible stories. Am I being disloyal to my Atheist beliefs?

--Gabriella
New York, NY

ASK CASSANDRA

***WITH THIS ISSUE,
WE ARE INITIATING
A NEW COLUMN,
“ASK CASSANDRA”***

***SUBMIT QUESTIONS:
NYCATHEISTS@AOL.COM***

Dear Cassandra:

I called the plumber on Sunday to fix my suddenly non-flushing toilet. He said he couldn't come because "Sunday belongs to the Lord." So I had a non-flushing toilet all day Sunday to honor the Lord. Tell me, if there were a god, would he really appreciate it that my toilet did not flush on "his" day?

-- Isabelle
New York, NY

Dear Gabriella:

The use of incense in a Catholic church is left over from medieval attempts to overcome the smell of pestilence, bad drainage systems and outhouses. The stained glass windows depict bible scenes because, in medieval times, most people could not read. So, when you go into a church, you are enjoying the half-baked solutions to serious problems of olden days. Atheists today enjoy the fresh fragrance of the outdoors, of flowers, of grass and other natural substances and, with almost universal literacy in civilized countries, we can enjoy allegorical stories in books and magazines; we don't need to have a priest read these stories to us and regurgitate them with his bias. Besides, the bible isn't the only place you can read fiction. I suggest you access Amazon.com and find lots of wonderful novels. For more realistic reading, try "The God Delusion" by our atheist friend, Richard Dawkins.



December 19, 2006 – Meet Up



December 23, 2006 – Solstice Party

RENEW / JOIN NYC ATHEISTS

Through our programs and activities, we have worked to bring awareness of our principles, our vision and, above all, of our existence as atheists. We have done it through our website, our meetups, our cable shows, our library and book club, our street tabling and our newsletters to enhance our visibility--all of which are funded by your membership.

With the continued growth of our membership, we gather strength in numbers and will more effectively counteract the threat of a looming theocracy.



NYC ATHEISTS — 2007 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

First Name: _____ Last Name _____

Street Address: _____ Apt No.: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email: _____ @ _____ Phone: (____) _____ - _____

NYC Atheists Inc. is a non-profit (501c) non-partisan, educational association with these purposes and goals:

1. To promote the total and absolute separation of church and state
2. To educate and inform the public about Atheism
3. To provide a forum for discussion about Atheism
4. To develop and engage in educational, cultural, charitable and social activities that are beneficial to the members to the NYC Atheists Inc., the Atheist community and the community at large.

YOUR 2007 MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

Basic __ \$ 25 Friend __ \$ 100 Sustainer __ \$ 250 Patron __ \$ 500 Benefactor __ \$ 1000

Signature: _____ Date: _____

**CHECK PAYABLE TO: NYC ATHEISTS INC. SEND APPLICATION TO: NYC ATHEISTS INC.
MEMBERSHIP - COOPER STATION P.O. Box 93 NY, NY 10276-0093**